

February 9, 2009

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and members of this committee. My name is Chris Benden. My wife Julie I raise three kids that were foster kids before we adopted through the state.

We opened our home to infants for the people of Montana for almost ten years. We stopped fostering because our three kids have special needs. Our middle child came to our house on Halloween with just a short notice. She was a 7 month old who was classified as failure to thrive. She couldn't even sit up. She had nothing. When a child like that comes, you don't say no. In this business you just find a way to come up with the stuff. The state gave their two thirds worth of clothes, diapers, formula and we supplied the rest. She would go off to visits only to come back without some of the things we had sent. This meant we paid to replace the things because the next state check was still a week away.

I say these kids are fostered for the people because that is who pays for their care. If we don't pay a little now we will pay much more later on: health problems, drop out rates, crime. Foster parents don't do this for themselves we do it for the kids. We shouldn't be asked to spend our own money to raise the state's kids. We spend our time, our emotions. We risk our safety at home, at work, and in our social circles. The kids show up with almost nothing. They need things and all these things are expensive. The state's clothing allowance works but it must keep up. It always needs to be more. Formula and diapers are very expensive and the state buys these things too but it also seems to end up short all too often.

As an adoptive parent I see what a healthy subsidy can do for our kids. Not only do my kids get their essentials I can afford to get them specialized therapy and actually not suffer when my wife fills up they tank or I need to spend a night out of town with my kids to access these therapies. Maybe a raise in foster rates will curb the lousy retention rate for foster parents. How much money is spent to train just one foster family and then have them quit six months later because they got frustrated always having to spend their own money. Once again I tell you that as a foster parent I gave everything I physically could to care for those kids. Don't ask me to spend my family's money because I will and I shouldn't.

Please support this bill HB353 because I know you don't want to go to a foster parent and tell them that you found a better way to spend the state's money other than on its young kids. Thank you for your time and commitment to the people of Montana.

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